WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY

Focus

Ground water/surface water interactions to be studied in Yakima River Basin

The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology), U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) and the Yakama Nation (YN) have agreed to study groundwater resources in the Yakima River Basin and to develop a hydraulic model to be used as a tool for water planning and management.

What will the study do?

Such a study will:

- Help us to better describe the link between ground and surface water sources in the area.
- Help agencies to protect senior water rights when making water right decisions.
- Support efforts to improve instream flows, including water acquisition under the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project.
- Estimate when, where and how much groundwater pumping affects stream flows.

Why is this important?

Ecology, the USBR and YN recognize that more scientific data is needed to develop a common technical platform for making sound, efficient and consistent water-resource management decisions in the Yakima River Basin. The Yakima Basin's surface water is under adjudication, and the effect of groundwater withdrawals on surface-water supplies needs to be better defined if good water management decisions are to be made.

The three parties have agreed to launch an independent study to model the inter-relationship of ground and surface waters in the Yakima River Basin. The reports and model will be used as a technical basis for making permit decisions on approximately 1,000 pending state water right applications basin-wide.

While the study is under way

The three agencies have agreed to manage water conservatively until the five-year study is complete. Ecology will withhold permit decisions on new groundwater applications until study results are available. Exceptions could include transfers and changes, public health and safety emergencies, and domestic water use from exempt wells.

If you have special accommodation needs, please contact Paula Smith at (360) 407-6607 or (360) 407-6006 TDD.

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